

# HOOKEDNOW

DAVE SKIP RICK  
HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

Welcome to the February-March issue of *HookedNow*. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments at: [sweltsa@frontier.com](mailto:sweltsa@frontier.com) (please include "HookedNow" in the subject line for quicker replies). If you enjoy this issue, please tell your fishing buddies about *HookedNow*.

There is good fishing to be found in February and March to be sure. Sometimes these two months offer a few mild breaks from the cold, and the bugs and fish respond with abandon. But this is also the perfect time to review and prepare for the coming spring and summer. With that in mind in this issue we discuss one of the great challenges of fly fishing - how to organize and set up your fly boxes. If you've been fly fishing for a number of years you know first hand just how disorganized your fly boxes can become. And if you are a new fly fisher you are probably wondering how to keep the dozens, and then hundreds, and then thousands of fly patterns from becoming a mess. We hope this issue will give you some ideas for solving this sticky problem.

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Photo by Rick Hafele



## RICK HAFELE- WHERE'S THAT FLY?

Photo by Rick Kruger/Marc Williamson



I recently fished the Deschutes River in central Oregon. Even though the air temp hovered near freezing and the water temp wasn't much warmer, I decided to give it a try hoping to find the mid-winter hatch of blue-winged olives (BWOs) coming off and trout feeding at the surface. Plus, there's usually not another angler in sight when snow covers the roads.

(Note: [CLICK HERE](#) for a short video of this trip and BWO hatch).

Just as I had hoped BWOs seemed to appear from nowhere starting in the early afternoon, lasting from about 1:00 to 2:30. Trout took notice as well, but with the cold water their rises were lazy and subtle. Great! Like often happens during this hatch the trout also became quite selective, so I had to try several different patterns to find something that worked. This meant combing through my fly boxes for just the right pattern I knew I had in there - somewhere. As it turned out I found a pattern that worked, but it wasn't exactly what I - or the fish - was looking for. A couple days later at home while tying flies and putting them in a fly box, I discovered some small BWO emergers that would have been perfect during the hatch but failed to locate on the stream during the heat of the rise. Dang, how can that happen? Or more importantly, how can I prevent that from happening next time? The answer seems simple, or is it?

How many fly boxes do you carry in your vest on a typical day of fishing? Do you stash even more in the car just to be safe? How do you have your flies organized within each box? By pattern type (nymph, emergers, dries, etc), by hatch (salmonfly, green drake, ...), or some combination? Many options exist and there's no one right way to do it. The important thing is that you have a system and you stick with it so you will be able to quickly find the fly pattern you need when you need it. And if you don't have a plan or



Photo by Rick Hafele

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system, fly boxes quickly turn into chaotic black holes where flies enter only to never again see the light of day, like my little CDC blue-winged olive emerger. Now is the time to clean and organize your fly boxes. But how?

I'm going to share with you my system. It's not perfect, as I found out on the Deschutes, but it might give you some insight about what not to do as well as what you can do. Even though not perfect it's a system that works for me most of the time, and when it fails it's generally because I didn't take the time to keep up with it. Nothing likes chaos more than fly boxes left on their own. Besides explaining how I organize my fly boxes, I'll also show you what I keep in them. This is rather personal, sort of like sharing what you keep in the bottom draw of your fly tying desk, so I hope you will keep this information to yourself.

Before I start discussing fly boxes, however, I thought I should describe my vest. Your vest after all determines to a large degree the number and size of fly boxes you can carry. I use a traditional vest rather than a chest pack type. The actual vest isn't that large, but it has a day pack that can be attached that I have set up to carry my DSLR camera and spare lens, plus it has room for water, a snack, rain slicker if needed, and an extra fly box or two. I can remove the backpack if I don't need it to lighten the load. I like this vest, particularly because the backpack compartment for the camera is completely water tight, including the zipper, a feature I have tested with success on several occasions.

As I said my vest itself isn't large. It holds four medium sized fly boxes, and if needed two more small ones. It also has room for the remaining items one needs like, leader spools, bottle of floatant, strike indicators, split shot, forceps, scissors, glasses, and.....? Talk about a closet full of stuff - yikes! Overall it carries everything I need for a day's fishing, but because it doesn't hold a lot of fly boxes I often switch out one fly box for another depending on where and when I'm fishing. When I dream about bad things happening, like having all my fishing gear stolen, the thing that causes the greatest despair is the thought of losing my fishing vest filled with my flies! I can quickly replace rods or reels, but my vest? The fly boxes and flies inside them are like an archeological dig through my fly-fishing life, and could never be completely replaced.



*Photo by Rick Hafele*

So what are these boxes and what's in them? For purposes here I'm going to focus on the boxes and flies I use for trout fishing on streams. There are also boxes of flies for fishing lakes, steelhead (people who know me, will be surprised to hear I have one!), smallmouth bass, carp, saltwater, etc. Depending on how much time and energy one puts into these other types of fly fishing, the number of fly boxes and variety of patterns you have will definitely vary. So with the focus on trout, I've listed below a blow-by-blow account of my boxes and how they are organized.

## Box 1 - Nymphs for mayflies and caddisflies

I probably open this fly box more than any other. It's a medium sized box with an extra page in the middle and uses foam with slits to hold the flies in place. Half of the box is dedicated to mayfly patterns and the other half to caddisflies. I don't usually count how many patterns I actually have, but decided to for this article. Right now this box contains 163 mayfly patterns and 146 caddis patterns. The actual number of pattern types, however, is much less. The major mayfly pattern styles include:

- Blue-winged olive nymphs size 16-20. Most are tied with Krystal flash bodies, but a few are tied with bright silver mylar, known as *lightning bugs*.
- Pale morning dun nymphs size 14-16. These include a small bead-head pattern similar to a Hare's ear and a number of Skip's nymphs in 16's and 14's
- March brown nymphs size 12-14. These are my go-to medium sized mayfly nymph patterns that can match a variety of different mayfly species that fall in this size range. They are relatively generic patterns, some tied with peacock bodies and others tied with dark brown dubbing.
- Green drake nymphs size 10-12. These flies work for the larger mayfly species including green drakes. Some are dark brown, others olive.



Photo by Rick Hafele

- Also stuck here and there is the odd Prince nymph (for some reason I rarely use Prince nymphs), and some emergers that should be in a different fly box. Like I said I'm not perfect!

The caddisfly half of the box includes:

- Green rock worm nymphs size 10-14. Most are tied with bright green Krystal flash bodies, but others have pale green and dark olive dubbed bodies. Nearly all are weighted and have bead-heads. I have to say these are my favorite caddis larva imitations, and besides imitating green rock worm larvae, they also match many net-spinning caddis larvae, and in a pinch *Brachycentrus* or the Mother's Day caddis larvae in the case.
- Saddle-case caddis size 16-20. I find these little nymphs more important than you might think. The saddle-case caddis, or *Glossosoma*, are very common and abundant and often take fish when other nymph patterns fail.
- A selection of Czech nymphs. These were given to me, and I must admit I don't fish them frequently.
- A selection of soft hackles and flymphs size 12-18. Technically these flies are emergers and not nymphs, but because I use them frequently I have them in the fly box I open most often. I know this doesn't make sense, and probably a good example of what you shouldn't do.
- A few odds and ends like one micro-chenille worm - go figure!



Photo by Rick Hafele

I use flies from this box just about every day I go fishing and would be lost if I left it at home.

## Box 2 - Mayfly dries and emergers

This is my go-to box during a mayfly hatch. It's a bigger box than my nymph box, with two sides that are deep enough the lids don't crush bushy dry-fly hackles. A quick count revealed that I have 156 flies in this box, and when I look at them closely I realize I need to spend some time reorganizing the flies in it following last year's fishing season as the different pattern types and sizes are all mixed up, which explains why I didn't find the blue-winged olive CDC emerger on the Deschutes when I needed it.



*Photos by Rick Hafele*



The major pattern types here include:

- Parachute dries in sizes 14-18 in light and dark colors.
- Harrop duns in sizes 12-16, mostly light to dark brown.
- Compara duns in sizes 14-16.
- Floating nymphs sized 14-18.
- Some spinner patterns sized 14-18.
- A few attractor patterns like Royal Wulffs size 12-14.

This fly box needs some reorganizing, so I'm glad we've had this time sharing.

## Box 3 - Caddisfly dries and emergers

I use the same style of fly box for caddis dries and emergers as I use for my mayfly dries. It's a Scientific Anglers box with a water tight seal and clear lids. I particularly like the see-through lids as they allow me to be sure I'm grabbing the right fly box.

Here's what's inside -



*Photos by Rick Hafele*



- The dry flies in this box vary more by size and color than by different pattern style. Most of the dry flies are deer hair caddis or some variation of it - using CDC or poly yarn for the wing for example. Most range in size from 14-18.
- A few large Skip Morris wooly wing dry flies, size 8-10. These are good patterns for the October caddis and even work as stonefly or hopper imitations.
- CDC flymphs (some with and some without bead-heads), size 14-18.
- Some odds and ends, like four crane fly adult patterns. Maybe these should be in my terrestrial pattern fly box?

Like my mayfly box, this box needs some mid-winter organizing.

## Box 4 - Dries and nymphs for stoneflies

This box is a medium sized box with dry flies on one side and nymphs on the other.



The nymphs are mostly dark brown to black - a few olive - and run in size from 12 to 8, 3xl. The dry flies include stimulators in sizes 12-8, some Norm Wood specials for the Golden Stone hatch, and a couple woolly wings for salmonfly adults. I don't carry a great variety of stonefly patterns, mostly because I can usually adapt a mayfly nymph pattern or caddisfly dry pattern for many species of stoneflies if needed. I often use the big nymphs in this box as the first fly in a two nymph rig when I need extra weight to sink my nymphs close to the stream bottom.

## Two Small Boxes - Miscellaneous Mayflies

I carry two other small compartment type fly boxes which contain a variety of small dry flies, mostly mayfly patterns. One (left photo below) holds a dozen or so rusty spinner patterns in sizes 14-18, some small BWO emergers and dries, and a few larger skating type dries. The other (right photo below) holds a number of CDC Compara duns, plus some parachute dry flies, both on size 14 hooks for the March brown hatch. There are also a few small stimulators in this box.

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I like these boxes, but I sometimes forget exactly what's in them and thus occasionally miss a pattern that would work well - the size 18 BWO thorax dun for example. Ideally the patterns in these boxes would be focused on a specific pattern or hatch - flies just for the BWO hatch, or just a variety of mayfly spinner patterns for example. The challenge is that over time the compartments get contaminated with patterns that can't find a home in one of my other boxes. Ah, the sad life of an orphan.



*Photos by Rick Hafele*



## What's left?

The six fly boxes described above are my everyday trout stream fly boxes. They have flies that work in British Columbia, Montana, Oregon, Wisconsin, and even Chile, pretty much wherever trout swim in streams. I do have other fly boxes for other waters or situations. For example I have one fly box with just terrestrial patterns - hoppers, ants, and beetles. Another box is filled with wooly buggers of various sizes and colors, and yet another with dry flies and nymphs for lakes. Then there is the box with just chironomids. I'm not a crazed chironomid lake fisher like some people I know, so my selection of midge patterns is kind of meager. But even with a relatively small selection, midges need their own fly box. Last I have a box just for smallmouth bass and another for steelhead. Yes, I actually have a box of steelhead flies, but they rarely see the light.

The challenge in all this is not only setting up a system, but keeping that system in order. Just like keeping papers filed correctly in an office, keeping flies filed where you want them takes time and energy. Where's that office assistant when you need one?

For me keeping any fly box organized ultimately fails in time for many reasons. For example, someone hands me a half dozen beetle patterns to try but I don't have my terrestrial fly box with me. Where should they go? Or during a good hatch I get caught up

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in fishing and don't take the time to put away all the flies I've been using back in their proper places. If this happens to you, then now is the time to sit down at your desk and go through all your fly boxes. Re-sort the patterns and put them where they belong. Reorganize a box if it seems to confusing. Not only will this help you on the stream the next time you go fishing, but it will also show you what fly patterns you need to tie or buy over the coming months. Then when spring weather and spring hatches arrive you'll know exactly where to find that size 18 twisted-tail, down-wing, CDC, sproat hook, film floater you tied just for this situation.

[CLICK HERE](#) for video of Rick discussing his fly boxes.

*Photo by Rick Hafele*



## SKIP MORRIS - FLY BOX CHOICES



Photo by Carol Morris

### FLY BOX BASICS

Most fly boxes, even if their corners are rounded or their faces bowed, are still boxes. So nearly all--if not all--of them are hinged. A hinge, in my opinion, is a hinge--when you check out a box, open and close it a few times to see if the hinge works smoothly and seems well-made. Simple enough.

A fly box also needs to stay closed once the lid is shut, simply to keep the flies inside--this means it needs a locking mechanism of some sort. There are and have been many sorts. The standard remains one or another variation of the overlapping snap, perhaps a lid whose lip pushes down tight over the edge of the box or perhaps two projections that interlock or perhaps a hinged latch. I've even seen magnets, one embedded in the box and

I've been trying to find the perfect fly box since I was ten or twelve years old, which was several decades ago. I never found it. What I did find was a truth: no fly box is perfect, but each design variation offers advantages and disadvantages.

Fly boxes keep changing--there seems always to be a new one that supposedly relegates all others to the category of outdated or inadequate. I've never actually seen it come to that, but often a new type of fly box does carry one or more useful innovations. Despite all that, the basic form of most fly boxes is about the same today as it was when I was a kid.

So let's begin with a look at the standard elements of a fly box.



Photo by Skip Morris

*Most, if not in fact all, boxes are hinged. A smooth-working and tough hinge should be a requirement for any box you buy.*



*One way or another fly boxes latch closed. On the left is a flexible snap and on the right a powerful little magnet embedded into the rim of the box. Another magnet embedded into the opposite rim meets the first to secure the box shut.*

Photos by Skip Morris



*Ripple foam has been a standard method of holding flies for a long time, and protects delicate dry-fly hackles.*

another in the lid, and they worked efficiently. The point is, you'd be wise to play with the locking mechanism a little before buying a particular fly box, just to make sure it's going to hold the lid closed as you bump around among river rocks and bank-side brush.

The latches on my Scientific Anglers boxes are a bit stiff and took some getting used to for me, but they're worth the tradeoff--the lid settles into a rubber gasket making the box watertight. If one of these boxes falls in the river, I have time to chase it because it won't sink. If I can't catch up to it or fail to realize it fell from the vest pocket I never zipped closed, it may stay afloat long enough for someone to find and return it, since I put my name and phone number on my fly boxes. My point is that most advantages in fly-box designs carry disadvantages; but if the advantages suit you and the disadvantages don't offend, you and this box may be a good fit.

Some fly boxes hold flies only along one side--with compartments or foam or such--while the other side is a lid and nothing more. Other boxes hold flies on both sides, the lid and the box. Yet others have a center plate and, really, two lids, holding flies along both sides of the plate--two surfaces for holding flies. Some boxes have a center plate but also a way of holding flies in the lids as well--*four* surfaces for holding flies.

The thing is, flies take space--especially big flies or dry flies with wings and hackles. The more space your flies take, the more likely a box that holds them along one side only is the right choice. But for tiny flies--20s and 24s--and low flies such as many nymphs, a box that holds flies along two or even four sides makes perfect sense. Wasted

space is never wise with fly boxes--most experienced fly fishers who fish for hatch-loving overfed trout carry only a smattering of the flies they wish they had on hand.

The shell of a fly box can be formed of metal, plastic, foam, wood, and probably another couple of materials I can't recall. Wood tends to be for elegant boxes that are sometimes mostly for show. Despite that, I have a couple of wooden boxes that have served me honorably for years.

Some very expensive boxes are aluminum, as are some fairly inexpensive ones.

Soft foam boxes are very light and buoyant, flexible too.

Most fly boxes today are plastic, and are consequently transparent--that can really help you find the flies you seek.

The essential box shape and hinge and latch and various materials--that pretty much covers the basics. Let's look at some options.

## THE HOLD

A fairly new craze in fly-box design is slitted foam--you push a fly backwards so that its bend sinks into a cut in dense foam rubber. I've had excellent luck with this style; rarely does a fly come loose.

The forerunner of slitted foam is the flat or "rippled," ridged, foam sheet. The ripple creates a depression for dry-fly hackles, to avoid crushing them. You simply push the point of the fly into the foam and the fly is locked in as it would be locked into the tough flesh of a trout's jaw. With this sort of system, the density of the foam is critical. If



Photo by Skip Morris

*This box that holds flies on four different surfaces is a fine choice for 18s, 20s, and smaller.*

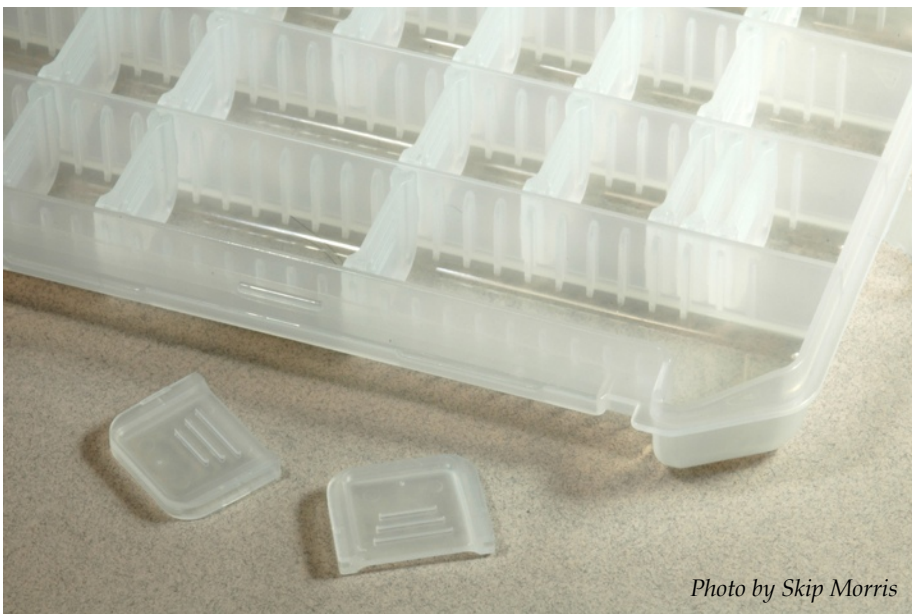
the foam is dense, which usually also means smooth and fairly hard, the flies will stay well. If the foam is soft and rough it is probably not very dense and won't hold flies well.

That covers the main approaches for locking flies into a fly box, the last is the simplest, and probably the original, in which flies aren't held at all, just...confined: the compartmented box.

## COMPARTMENT STYLE

A compartment-style fly box is divided inside into small box-like spaces. The flies are jumbled, but grouped by type, normally. The better you group the flies, the better you'll find the ones you want. The two big advantages to the compartmented box are 1. it holds many flies, and 2. it's usually the least expensive of them all.

The price is variable, though. The simplest--just a box with a lid--can cost under ten bucks. But some compartmented boxes have little inner lids for each compartment--a real plus in a wind or in case you drop the box, but more expensive than the simple box with one lid from which *all* the flies can easily tumble. Boxes with a lid for each compartment aren't necessarily high cost, but an elegant English Wheatley box of this sort may run over \$100. To many, a fly box is more than a vessel for flies.



*This compartmented box includes removable dividers so that you can vary the size of the compartments.*

*Photo by Skip Morris*

## FLY SIZE

To determine which box styles may suit you best, you need to consider the size of the flies you put into them. A fly box that efficiently holds tight rows of diminutive size 20 to size 24 emergers is hardly the right box for five-inch tarpon flies. Most fly boxes are designed to hold a fairly broad range of fly sizes, but there are reasonable limits.

For trout in both rivers and lakes, I carry boxes for at least three different fly sizes. First, a box for streamers. Streamers, even small ones, tend to be very long trout flies. So this box needs long compartments or just plenty of space all around.

Second, a general-purpose trout box. This one's for flies of size 16 flies up to perhaps 10 or 8 at the big end, the middle range. I actually carry three such boxes, one with imitations of mayflies, another with caddis, and another with miscellaneous imitations (crane flies, flying ants...) and attractor patterns. I'd carry more middle-range boxes if I comfortably could, but I comfortably can't.

Third, the big-fly box. This box holds the Chernobyl Ants and Dave's Hoppers and big imitation stonefly nymphs and adults, flies often tied on hooks of size 6, 2X long, even bigger. These flies don't match the length of streamers but are generally wider, and this box suits their dimensions.

Fourth, the tiny fly box. Flies under size-16 are seldom needed in my trout-lake fishing, so my tiny fly box is for rivers only. It holds flies on four surfaces, and though it's small it still holds scads of 20s to 26s. I always bring it to rivers and am often glad I did.

## FLY TYPE

You need to decide if your floating flies ( dry flies and half-floating emerger flies) and sinking flies (nymphs, soft-hackled flies...) can go into the same box. I long ago decided that both in a single box worked best for me. For example, in my trout vest I carry a box of mayfly imitations, including nymphs, emergers, dry flies, and soft-hackled flies; the box holds flies on each side of a center plate, nymphs and soft-hackled flies on one side, dries and emergers on the other.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

As I said, to some a fly box is more than a container; it's something to behold, to be brushed lovingly with fingertips. To these fly fishers craftsmanship and quality are critical. Fly fishing isn't about gathering meat for survival but about pleasure as I see it, so

more power to them. But if you're new to fly fishing, you do need to know that a plain and fairly inexpensive fly box can do the job well.

A box must fit into the pockets of your fly vest, or chest pack or hip pack or whatever. It's wise to bring your vest (or whatever you use) along when you go shopping for fly boxes.

Never put your flies wet or even damp into your boxes--the hooks of sodden flies will rust, as may the hooks around them. This is a problem even with ventilated boxes but critical with boxes that are airtight. Get a fly-dryer for your vest (mine is a chubby little container with a small opening on top--drop in the flies wet, take them out dry the next day and return them to their boxes).

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Okay, there are scads of choices among fly boxes. But don't let that spook you. Most fly-box designs do their job admirably and most are inexpensive and last many years, so if you're even a little bit careful in your shopping you can't really go all that wrong.

Photo by Skip Morris



[CLICK HERE](#) to watch a video of Skip discussing the various types of fly boxes.

## DAVE HUGHES – HOW I ORGANIZE MY FLY BOXES OR WISH I DID!

Photo by Rick Hafele



I organize my fly boxes in two separate ways: 1. In theory, and 2. In practice. I can assure you that the theory is better than the practice.

When I was young, before I became a writer myself, I always had this desire to look into the fly boxes of famous fly fishermen. My dream was almost particular to Ernie Schwiebert, who wrote one of my early--and also late--favorite books: *Nymphs*. He wrote a lot of others, too, but that book specifically made me want to peer into his nymph box, or boxes. I assumed he would have several of them, and I was sure they would be perfectly organized: nymphs lined up in row and row, each according to its size and kind, all inventoried and easily found for application against trout at the precise right moment.

I never did get that look into Schwiebert's fly boxes, and he's sadly passed away, so I never will. They might have been as neat as I imagined. They might not. If anybody has any answers about this--had a chance to examine Ernie's fly boxes--I'd like to hear from you.

When I became a fly fishing writer myself, I discovered that I layered the flies I tied over the flies that I already owned, in the boxes they were already in. The result was somewhat less than organized at first, and became farther away from any imagined neatness the longer time went on...it's gone on a long time now, and no magic hand has descended to wave a wand and organize my fly boxes. As a consequence, finding the right fly in a few of them has become more like performing an archeological dig than it is like going fly fishing and easily finding the right fly when needed, the way I always imagined it.

The theories are a lot more organized. For example, in my book *Nymphs for Streams and Stillwaters*, I called for the purchase and filling of three fly boxes, built around the three parts of the book: Searching Nymphs, Imitative Nymphs, and Stillwater Nymphs. That is the way you should do it...it's also the way I should do it, since I wrote the book. I actually went so far as to buy three big C&F boxes, into which I was going to tie selections of the flies about which I wrote, for photographs to illustrate each of the three parts of the text. However, it turned out to be a long book. The tying for photography of the steps for each fly stretched out the project. By the time it was ready for delivery, there was not

enough time left to tie the flies to fill those three boxes...so the boxes remained and still remain on my tying bench, empty, to shame me. However, the theory still stands: you should buy that book, divide your nymphs into those three categories, and tie a box full of each. I promise they will serve you well. I also promise I'd like to fish with you, follow you around, whine a bit when I'm unable to find the nymph I need, see if you'll loan me one of yours.

In theory, I would have a dry fly box full of searching dressings that I use all the time. In practice, I have two such boxes, big Orvis compartmented boxes that are so stuffed with disjointed collections of patterns that I have to carry both of them to have any hope of recovering the right fly for the searching situation I'm in at the moment. Think of this, though: I'd have to add those two big boxes to the three boxes of nymphs I've already mentioned. You can see that my vest would begin to bulge, and we're not very far into this article already. Added to those two boxes of searching dries, I'd like to have dry fly boxes for mayflies, caddisflies, stoneflies, midges, terrestrials, gnats and nits, fancies, and another just for lakes...that vest has now burst.

I'm making it sound worse than it is. In practice, I have one large nymph box that pretty handily contains most of the nymphs that I use, out on streams. It's not specific to any order of insects; it contains both searching and imitative patterns; it fits in a vest pocket, and pretty well fills that pocket all by itself, but it also contains the nymph that I need in almost any situation in which I find myself. Since I generally rig two where it's legal, the box has a range of sizes from giant salmonfly nymphs down to tiny Pheasant Tails. Each of these flies serves double duty. The big one is both imitative, and also my common choice for the larger of a brace even when there are no salmonfly nymphs around. The smaller one is specific to BWO nymphs, which often need to be imitated, but it's also an excellent choice for the smaller nymph in any two-fly rig. So, in simple form and condensed version, that nymph box carries all I'm likely to need--at least all I'm going to have available, so it better have all I need!--when I'm on moving water. Stillwaters are not represented in that box; I do always insist on the need to carry separate fly boxes for lakes and ponds, because they have separate sets of food forms.

*Photo by Dave Hughes*



*Mayfly, stonefly, and caddisfly nymphs ready to go. Oh...and yes, a few San Juan worms too!*

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Beyond that big box of nymphs, and the two big boxes of searching dry flies, and an equally big box stuffed with an assortment of wet flies, flymphs, and soft-hackles--I did, after all, write *Wet Flies*--I have what I call 'hatch boxes' for the most important groups over which I fish most often. These tend to be medium-sized boxes, and tend to be under-stuffed with flies. The reason is simple: I tie into them when I'm on a trip and into a particular hatch, and my tying on trips is sporadic, so they don't tend to get filled. I like that, though. Fishing over hatches always requests lots of experimentation with fly patterns, so it's handy to have abundant expansion gaps in the fly boxes specific to those hatches.

My hatch boxes, at present, are many: one for BWOs and PMDs; another for a mix of Green Drakes, Hexs, and strangely, hoppers...I don't know why--they're all large, they're all summer; a box for midges; a whopping big box for caddis, that I started to fill some years ago with a wide array of larval, pupal, and adult patterns, and got waylaid by a project and never finished; a box for terrestrials that should get far greater weight--read size and number of patterns--than I've been able to give it.

I carry separate fly boxes for lakes, but have to admit they've become tangles, so that I need to start over. But they contain quite a few specifics, and I'd hate to be without them. For example, lakes have scuds, and speckle-wing mayflies, and midges that are larger than those found in streams, and of course leeches, plus dragons and damselfly insects and other beasts that in experience are most important in water that is still.

Photo by Dave Hughes



I have one box of which I'm particularly proud, but which I'd like to replace with something bigger. It's a small-stream box, tied specifically for patterns that I fish on small waters. This is home to Royal Wulffs, Elk Hair Caddis, Deer Hair Caddis, Stimulators, Lime Humpys, Parachute Hoppers, and a few other dries. But I've extended it far beyond dries. It also has a small selection of searching nymphs, soft-hackle and traditional winged wets, and even a few streamers that work well on small water, where so many trout spend time happily chasing sculpins, pinching their tails. This medium-sized C&F box

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for many years was the only one I carried on small streams. It's always easy to locate in my small-stream vest. In fact, I fish small streams so often that I have a special daypack--an old but still excellent Abel rig--outfitted with waders, a vest, a rod and reel, wading staff and water filter bottle, all stuffed into it, and never anywhere else. I can grab that daypack, hike off to a stream, and never fear leaving anything behind.

I once made a trip to Chile, and took only that Abel bag, and only that fly box. It served me well enough, and I was able to whine successfully enough to get the right flies when it failed to contain them.

Now whining...there should be the subject for an article, and I'm the one to write it, because I'm an expert at it...

...but back to fly boxes. When I was in Japan with my wife and daughter some years ago, I fished with an expert on small waters, and he had a fly that I tried there, caught lots of trout on, and brought back here, and caught lots more trout on it than I did on my normal run of small stream flies. So I named it after its originator--the Saito-san Special--and tied a box full of them. It's a cute little Bug Luggage box, and tucks into a pocket nicely, so I carry it on small streams now, in addition to the C&F one I've carried for years...decades!

*Photo by Rick Hafele*



*Dave discussing fly selection with John Smeraglio, Deschutes River guide and fly-shop owner.*

That about sums up my fly boxes, except for the ones specific to sea-run cutts, summer steelhead, smallmouth bass, bluegill, and a few other beasts that can be fished for with flies. I've taken a few trips for pike, in Canada, so I have a box for them, too, though it hasn't been out of the closet in many years. Still, if I get an invitation, I'll be ready, so I recommend you begin construction of a box of pike flies, too, but if you don't, and need one in a hurry, you can borrow mine.

When I lived in Astoria, Oregon and Colonel Tony Robnett retired from the Army and moved to town, we became fishing partners. On one of his earliest trips, to the Deschutes and beyond to a few desert streams, I wasn't able to go, and he asked me what flies he ought to take. I was so busy on a book project at that moment that I knew I wasn't going to go fishing for the duration of his trip. So I handed him one of my searching dry fly boxes, the one stuffed with Stimulators and Elk Hair Caddis, and

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said, "Just take this, use what you need, bring it back, and I'll re-tie whatever you lose." Tony was a bit stunned, but took the box, had a very successful trip, didn't lose many flies, and became a fast friend...though we didn't repeat that exercise about the fly boxes. However, it's a trick you can use in either direction: either loan one of your own boxes to secure a suspicious friend, or borrow one from Rick or Skip because they're generous and will always have what you need.

However, I suggest you offer to tie what you lose, rather than depending on them to do it. They might not have those boxes replenished by the time you desire to borrow them again.

One last important note about how I organize my fly boxes: I carry a Sage boat bag, and it holds every fly box I own. If I'm in a boat, it's on the seat next to me. If it's a road trip, it's in the back of the rig. I would never go far without it, if the trip allows taking it. If the trip won't, I have no choice but to ponder over my boxes, decide which go and which stay...I forgot to mention earlier, I've got a couple of big streamer boxes specific to South America, where I used to go often.

I'll tell you something else that doesn't belong here. On several trips, from ocean rock bass to trout on Yamsi Ranch, the only fly that I've found to work is Skip's Morris Minnow streamer...I have no idea why, but it has outfished a dozen of streamers that I've always considered excellent. So there you go; the Morris Minnow is available for sale from Solitude Flies, or with a much greater degree of difficulty, by whining to Skip. Use them as seed to start your own separate streamer box.

*Photo by Rick Hafele*



*Skip's Morris Minnow. You should try one!*

I also advise you to start a specific box for whining flies, though in the present economy, it might take you quite some time to fill it.

###

## WHICH WAY IS THE RIGHT WAY?

*Skip's caddis nymph box*



*Dave's general nymph box*



We thought it would be instructive to show how the three of us organize our fly boxes for caddisfly nymph patterns. Of course we're shocked that they aren't all exactly alike. Three anglers, three different fly boxes filled with different flies but for the same general purpose. (Note: Dave doesn't have a nymph box dedicated just to caddisflies, so this is his general nymph box that includes mayfly, stonefly, and caddisfly nymphs - and some San Juan worms too.) Of interest however, is that while we use different patterns styles, we each have flies that match the dominant caddisfly groups: green rock worms, net-spinning caddis, and cased caddis.

*Rick's caddis nymph box*



## Say What?

We received two questions from readers for this issue. Here's our best shot at the answers! Thanks and keep the questions coming.

### Question 1:

I was just reading your answer to Stan's question in the Dec-Jan issue concerning the correct amount and sizes of rods, reels and lines. Something you said caught my attention and reminded me I have a lot to learn about line types. While correctly calling for (in my opinion) the 9' 6wt. rod as your base rod you mentioned a WF line. When mentioning your choice for a lighter weight rod you suggest a 4wt. rod with a DT line. While I have been fly fishing for a while now and fish about 40 or 50 days a year, now that I'm retired, I am confused about the differences and advantages of the two line types. I have always considered the advantage and major difference as being able to turn the DT around after a couple of seasons and double your line life but I am not aware of any other advantages. Please discuss those differences since I am now certain you are going to enlighten me and possibly several other readers. Thanks and keep up the great work!

T. G. Edwards

T. G. - Thanks for the question.

Certainly one of the benefits of a double taper (DT) fly line is the ability to turn it around when one half wears out, and thus double its useful life. But there are other advantages as well. Double-taper lines tend to land on the water a little softer than weight forward (WF) lines. For this reason they are often considered a better line when delicate presentations are needed to avoid spooking surface feeding trout. This also explains why DT lines get used most often on light-line rods - say 4-weights and lighter - that are primarily used for delicate presentation fishing. Such small rods are also rarely used in windy conditions or for casting large flies, both situations that favor WF lines.

Another reason to use DT lines is that a particular rod may cast much better with a DT than a WF. This may not make sense, and I'd have to ask a rod designer to explain it, but I have found over the years of casting a wide range of rods that on occasion a rod that I had to fight with WF line, suddenly cast with ease when a DT line was put on. I've also had the opposite occur, where a rod cast much better with a WF line than a DT. So if you have a rod that just doesn't feel right to you, try using a line with a different taper design and you might be pleasantly surprised.

I'll end by pointing out the obvious that there a lot more taper designs available now than ever before. Too many for me to keep up with! This includes some WF lines that are designed to present the fly with the delicacy of a DT and still provide the other casting benefits of a WF. The only way to determine what works and what doesn't is to fish with them. Talk to a knowledgeable shop employee or fish with some rods rigged with different line tapers, then judge for yourself.

Hope this helps, T.G.

Happy casts - Rick

Question 2:

Is the trout able to discern color.. 1. of a fly on the surface.... 2. of a fly in the film.... 3. of a fly just under the film... 4 in the water column ... 5 near the bottom (nymphal stage)? Where is color the most prominent and important to the fish and therefore, the fly tyer.

Sincere Thanks.... Don Cox

Hi, Don,

As the unofficial HookedNow fly-tying consultant, I'll respond to this part of your question: "Where is color the most prominent and important to the fish and therefore, the fly tyer?"

The main factor in fly color, in my experience, is where in relation to the surface of the water the fly is fished—does it float or sink? Hold a fly up some time and take a good look. Against even a cloudy sky the back-lighting seems to drain the color. The underside of the fly is in some shadow and consequently loses some color too. Much of the fly will rest above the waterline where the fish gets a poor look at it or just doesn't bother to look. So color in dry flies doesn't concern me much, even with fairly picky trout. I try to get fairly close to the overall darkness or lightness of the insect's coloring, but if my fly is tan or light-gray and the mayflies are yellow, I figure I'm in good shape, even with pretty tough trout.

I'm not alone in considering color last on the list of qualities that make a fly effective—size and silhouette and movement (or lack of movement) all come well ahead of color. A fly the exact color of the natural but two hook sizes too large, skidding around while the natural rests quietly on the water, is plain useless.



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But I do think color becomes more important with sinking flies—mainly nymphs and streamers—than with dry flies because the fish get a good look at these flies. There’s no back-light washing out the color or shadow hiding it. Add to that clear water moving slowly enough for the fish to really look over your fly and color takes on even more importance.

So, on the whole, I'm a little more careful about color in nymphs and streamers, but not a lot more. However, when I’m faced with tough brown trout rising in the most careful fashion and refusing flies as a habit, I’ll try to get everything as right that I can, fly-color included.

So, my advice is this: Don’t fret much about color in flies (except with the most challenging trout), and concentrate more on getting the fly’s size and shape and action right.

Thanks for the excellent question, Don.

Best, Skip Morris

**Readers, if you have a question for Skip, Dave, or Rick just email it to:**

**[sweltsa@frontier.com](mailto:sweltsa@frontier.com)**

**Please include “HookedNow Question” in the subject line.**

## News from Dave, Rick, & Skip!

2-Day workshop with Skip & Rick - February 25 & 26, 2012 - Issaquah, WA

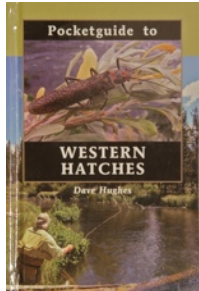
### MASTERING WESTERN RIVERS AND LAKES

Do you ever -

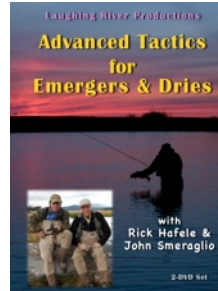
- Fish the same few fly patterns over and over, even when they aren't working?
- Feel confused about what fly to use when your favorite patterns fail?
- Wonder what presentation to use when feeding trout ignore your fly, even when your pattern looks right?
- Wonder what to do when there's no sign of feeding trout?
- Typically rely on others - like fly shop staff - to tell you what the fish are taking?

**You'll get answers to these questions and more.**

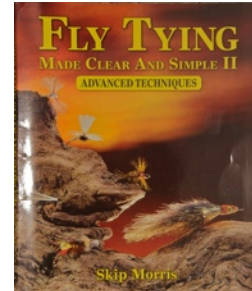
**More Info & Registration details at:  
[hookednow.com/events](http://hookednow.com/events)**



Dave's newest book, *Pocketguide to Western Hatches*, just out September 2011, is now available.--\$21.95-- Stackpole Books, 2011



Rick's newest instructional DVD (2-disc set) with John Smeraglio titled, *Advanced Tactics for Emergers & Dries*, is now available. Order it online at [www.laughingrivers.com](http://www.laughingrivers.com) or get at your local fly shop. \$29.95 - Laughing River Productions, 2011



Skip's latest book, *Fly Tying Made Clear and Simple II, Advanced Techniques*, offers thorough instructions for tying many great patterns for fussy trout. Frank Amato Pub, 2009

**To learn more about Dave, Skip, and Rick's latest publications, where they are speaking, or to book them for your own program , go to their personal websites at:**

Skip Morris: <http://www.skip-morris-fly-tying.com/>  
Rick Hafele: <http://www.rickhafele.com/RH/Home.html>  
Dave Hughes: <http://dave-hughes-fly-fishing.com/>